

LEGISLATIVE BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON AUTISM
Task Force on Early Identification & Intervention
November 14, 2006

Proposal for the Task Force Process

This task force was convened to assist the Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism in providing recommendations to the Legislature and the Governor for improving the lives of Californians with autism and their families. The legislation that established the commission, Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 51 (Perata), Resolution Chapter 124, Statutes of 2005, mandates that “the Commission shall identify gaps in programs, services, and funding related to the early identification of autism spectrum disorders and provide recommendations to close the identified gaps.”

The commission is indebted and grateful to the participants of this important task force. We are energized by the prospect of the recommendations and “work product” that will emanate from the diverse talents represented within this group. Given the timeframe for completing this work, it is proposed that the task force process be organized into three meetings as follows:

- **Meeting 1** would focus on the identification of major problems and gaps, particularly those that are amenable to state policy intervention. The task force will be asked to consider the list of cross-cutting themes identified during the first commission meeting, and to identify and distill the major problems and gaps. Participants will receive a handout identifying the cross-cutting themes and some additional questions that can help stimulate thinking.
- **Meeting 2** would begin with a review of the problems and gaps identified during the first meeting and addition of any others. Then the majority of the meeting would be structured to focus on the identification of solutions, strategies, and opportunities to close the gaps.
- **Meeting 3** would provide an opportunity to review the findings from the first two meetings and to adopt specific recommendations to present to the commission.

The three task force meetings are scheduled for: Tuesday, November 14th in Burbank; Wednesday, December 13th (location pending); and Wednesday, January 10th (location pending.)

IB_Background information on Task Force & Commission (First Meeting)

This same process will be used for the two other task forces so there will be consistency in the products presented to the Autism Commission.

Discussion of Major Problems and Gaps

The following comments and recommendations are provided as topics to consider in framing the identification of major problems with regards to the early identification, assessment and intervention of children with autism spectrum disorders. They are NOT intended to be proscriptive or to limit innovative discussions and proposals.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS & ISSUES FOR NOVEMBER 14TH DISCUSSION:

When you think about the goal of identifying autism spectrum disorders in children and providing appropriate interventions at the earliest age possible, what major problems and gaps can you identify?

Consider the following cross-cutting themes identified during the first commission meeting:

- Public awareness of autism spectrum disorders and the symptoms
- Existence and use of best practices for screening, diagnosis, education, and treatment
- Training and professional development of educators and service providers
- Access to services by underserved populations
- Eligibility criteria for public services
- Health insurance coverage
- Collaboration across public and private service systems
- Adequacy of resources
- Family-focused services and supports
- Systems accountability and measurement of individual outcomes

Consider these issues:

Criticality—Why is this problem important to address? What are the implications for individuals and families, society, the state?

Barriers—What are the specific barriers that contribute to this problem? For example: Does the problem stem from the structure of existing law? Is there a gap not covered by law? Is there an implementation problem? Is there inadequate funding, training, information, coordination, accountability, etc?

IB_Background information on Task Force & Commission (First Meeting)

State Role—What is the state’s role and responsibility to address this problem, including any legal mandates?

Service systems—What are the roles and responsibilities of entities that coordinate or provide services at the local level? Regional centers, public schools, local governments, health care providers, health care plans, non- profit agencies and schools, family support organizations, child care and early childhood education providers, and other service providers.

Data/Information—What information is available that describes or demonstrates this problem? Who and how many individuals are affected? What information do we wish was available? Is it possible to obtain this information quickly and how? Are there other experts and stakeholders that need to be engaged in this issue?

Vision/Solutions—What is your vision for solving this problem? Are there any successful models to learn from? What specific changes are needed at the state level? At the local level? What is the feasibility of change? Is the idea ready for implementation? Will it require additional resources? Will it require policy development, new technology, or systems change? What are the possible strategies? Are there opportunities to leverage?

Suggested “Rules of the Road” for Prioritizing Problems and Gaps

The following are issues and concepts that are often helpful in prioritizing problems. Further, these concepts may also be useful in the future implementation of recommendations by means of future changes in legislation, policy and/or resource allocations.

1. Parents and individuals working in the field believe there is an immediate critical problem or gap to address. In addition, there may be information that demonstrates the extent and criticality of the problem.
2. The state has a clear role and responsibility to address the issue.
3. The potential solution is clearly identified and feasible to implement. Changes required to implement the solution are spelled out (i.e., need for funding, training, etc).
4. The solution to the problem is cost effective, meaning that it is the right thing to do at the right time.
5. The solution is consistent with the state’s values, role, and responsibilities.

IB_Background information on Task Force & Commission (First Meeting)

6. The outcomes of the solutions recommended can be measured and quantified.
7. The solution has the potential for systemic change that would benefit a larger population of children with developmental needs in addition to those with autism spectrum disorders.